

Testimony of
Daphne Kwok, Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,
and Human Resources

National Parks of California
Oversight Hearing

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Introduction

I am Daphne Kwok, Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to the preservation of the Immigration Station, as a place that honors the complex and rich cultural heritage of Pacific Coast immigrants and their descendants. I have recently relocated to San Francisco from Washington, DC to accept this unique opportunity to be a part of American history.

Thank you, Chairman Souder for the opportunity to describe in the record the strong partnership that the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) has with the National Park Service (NPS) and the California State Parks (CSP) in telling the story of the “Ellis Island of the West.” Angel Island Immigration Station is the “bookend” to Ellis Island, telling another chapter of immigrant roots, part of the “peopling of America.” We are particularly thankful to you for your leadership in the recent passage of H.R. 606, the Angel Island Immigration and Restoration Act and that is expected to be signed shortly by the President. As you know, this legislation will authorize up to \$15 million in federal funding to preserve and restore this national treasure.

Since we testified before your Subcommittee in 2004, much has happened and we are happy to give you an update on our progress. We are delighted that you are holding this hearing in San Francisco so you can see first hand the Immigration Station, and the importance of restoring and preserving it.

Most Americans know the story of Ellis Island, which processed millions of immigrants crossing the Atlantic, but the story of Angel Island remains virtually unknown. Angel Island was also federal facility enforcing federal immigration policy. Located in the middle of San Francisco Bay, within the footprint of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), Angel Island Immigration Station was routinely the first stop for most immigrants crossing the Pacific Ocean. Between 1910 and 1940, it is estimated that Angel Island Immigration Station processed paperwork for a million people; immigrants from around the world including Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Korean, Filipino, Mexican and Russian immigrants got their first taste of the United States at Angel Island.

Preserving the Legacy

It has been 50 years since the Angel Island Immigration Station was actively used. The buildings and the poems carved on the walls of the detention barracks have deteriorated due to time and the elements. To protect these historical treasures, AIISF has worked tirelessly to raise awareness and dollars to preserve the site and its history. Our goal, in partnership with California State Parks and the National Park Service, is to create a world-class visitor and genealogical research center to ensure that the story of Pacific Coast immigration can be told for generations to come, a West Coast bookend to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. AIISF's achievements include:

- Designation of the site as a National Historic Landmark in 1997, and one of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places” in 1999
- In 1998, Senator Daniel Akaka proposed and Congress approved \$100,000 to conduct a study to determine the feasibility and desirability of preserving and interpreting sites within the Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA) that relate to immigration and the peopling of the nation, which included Angel Island Immigration Station.
- Placement of a \$400,000 earmark in the California state budget in 1999 and \$15 million in California bond funds for the restoration into Prop. 12 in 2000
- Receiving \$500,000 from the Department of the Interior from its special Save America’s Treasures program for the preservation of the Chinese poems carved into the barracks walls
- \$3 million funding from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE) to begin Phase 2 of the Station’s reconstruction—the renovation and preservation of the historic Hospital into a museum, interpretative center, library, assembly and research center
- Preparing for a national capital campaign aimed at individual, corporate, private foundation giving to supplement governmental funds towards the preservation of the Immigration Station in 2005. AIISF has retained the expertise of Signature Philanthropy, which raised funds for the restoration of Ellis Island, for this effort.
- In 2004-2005, we testified at three hearing on Capitol Hill including your Subcommittee, the House Resources Subcommittee on National Park and the Senate Energy and Resources Subcommittee on National Parks.
- On November 16, 2005, the Congress passed H.R. 606, the Angel Island Immigration Restoration and Preservation Act, which is expected to be signed by the President soon. This legislation authorizes up to \$15 million to be appropriated for the restoration and preservation effort.

Over the past few years, AIISF and its preservation partners CPS and NPS, have conducted historic preservation studies with approximately \$500,000 in funds raised from private, state and federal sources. CPS and AIISF have jointly completed a master plan for the site, calling for restoration for the historic Immigration Station in three phases. The first phase of the restoration efforts is being funded by \$15 million in California state bond funds and a \$500,000 Save America's Treasures grant. The core project is expected to cost \$50 million.

Federal Role

Like Ellis Island, Angel Island Immigration Station's history and legacy is important to all Americans, not just Californians. Nearly \$18.5 million of state funds have been raised to date to support the preservation project. The addition of federal dollars serves to endorse the national importance of Angel Island Immigration Station's history, one which differs significantly from Ellis Island, yet offers equally important and inspiring lessons. The Immigration Station was built to enforce federal laws and

was operated by a federal agency throughout its period of significance. The Angel Island was the place where on the ground level, officials interpreted and implemented immigration practices that affected not just individual people but also other governments' policies.

Just as Ellis Island immigrants arriving from across the Atlantic Ocean profoundly changed our country, so too did Angel Island immigrants who crossed the Pacific. Angel Island immigrants played a vital role in the development of the American West, and the peopling and prosperity of our nation. Asian immigrants were pioneers in the agricultural and fishing industries of the West. They reclaimed the Sacramento and San Joaquin deltas by constructing networks of irrigation canals and constructing miles of dikes and ditches. In doing so, they played a lead role in transforming California into the nation's leading agricultural state. These immigrants and their descendants helped create the vibrant palette of ethnic cultures that first painted the American West and whose impact is now felt throughout the nation.

The eloquent and heartfelt poems carved on the walls of the Detention Barracks serve as a physical touchstone and testimony of the experiences of immigrants who crossed the Pacific Ocean. The poems, along with the transcripts of their interrogations are stored at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in San Bruno, California, provide firsthand documentation of the immigrants' experiences.

Immigration Station's Hospital building will serve a family history/genealogy center for digital access of NARA's immigration records and will house additional exhibitions and programs exploring Pacific Coast Immigration. Unfortunately, the hospital building is deteriorating rapidly and with each winter the structure faces an uncertain survival. Funding, in a timely manner, is desperately required to prevent further deterioration and to stabilize and restore the building. With your leadership, we hope to obtain federal appropriations next year to help save the hospital building.

Unique Relationship

The rare and complementary partnership between AIISF, the National Park Service and California State Parks has been most beneficial in pooling our collective resources toward a common goal. AIISF's small staff and board of directors work diligently as stewards of the Immigration Station site and history by maintaining and building our relationships to the broader community; schools, the press, advocating for legislation, fundraising in the corporate and private sectors.

Through our partnership with CPS, we successfully submitted a proposal to the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE), which resulted in a \$3 million grant for the hospital preservation and construction. When a \$60,000 obstacle in the form a required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) study stood in the way before the \$3 million grant could be accessed, CPS Director Ruth Coleman cleared the way by providing the needed funds for the study. We plan to submit a second proposal for an additional \$3 million to CCHE in January.

AIISF has been invited by CPS to participate in the interview process for a new Angel Island superintendent. Being a part of the hiring process underscores the importance of the partnership.

Current Status of the Immigration Station

In mid-August 2005, major construction for the restoration of immigration station's barracks and construction of the footprint of the administration building began utilizing California state bond funds.

A day before the site was closed for construction work, AIISF co-sponsored a Community Picnic with CSP and the Angel Island Association at the Immigration Station. Over 300 persons, many whom were descendents, toured the barracks one last time, and attended film screenings and readings by children's book authors before the preservation work started.

AIISF is working to bring the Angel Island story to national attention through media exposure. Recent in-depth articles about the Immigration Station restoration project have appeared in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, the Sacramento *Bee*, *Associated Press*, and *Voice of America* among some of the major press.

Fundraising Update

AIISF is continuing to seek support of the restoration efforts. We plan to submit a second grant application to CCHE for the maximum amount of \$3 million to continue our work. The application is due on January 31st with awards announced in July 2006.

AIISF has hired Signature Philanthropy who raised the funds for the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island restoration to consult with us. We are currently putting together a diverse National Board of Directors that will have geographic and ethnic representation and will be responsible for major fundraising. Signature Philanthropy is working with us to develop a corporate outreach strategy as well. In the works is a Marketing/Public Relations Committee that will assist us in branding the Immigration Station for our fundraising campaign. We have already been in discussion with a number of Fortune 500 companies about their interest in supporting the Immigration Station.

Building the Future

The enduring value of Angel Island Immigration Station lies in the lessons that its past can teach us about our present and our future. Immigration is a national story, one, which gets to the very heart of the American identity - "Who is an American?" and "Who is included or excluded and how has that changed over time?" While Angel Island Immigration Station represents a difficult chapter in our national history, it is ultimately, a story of the triumph and the perseverance of immigrants who endured and established new lives in this country. Angel Island and Ellis Island serve as bookends, not only in geography, but also in meaning and experience.

The restoration of Angel Island Immigration Station is a prime example of how everyday Americans can work together with private, State and Federal partners to preserve an important, yet little known chapter of our national story. Collaboration is the only way to make this a reality. We need a West Coast counterpart to Ellis Island to reflect a uniquely American, yet universal story of immigration.

Thank you for your understanding of the importance of this project. Your support for the three-way partnership with the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, California State Parks and National Park Service is critical to our ability to restore and preserve Angel Island Immigration Station. In doing so, generations can appreciate this site, a symbol of the perseverance of the immigrant spirit and the diversity of this great nation.

Photographs of Angel Island Immigration Station



Angel Island Immigration Station
Historic photo courtesy California State Parks



Immigrants arriving at Angel Island
Historic photo courtesy California State Parks



Administration Building, Angel Island Immigration Station
Historic photo courtesy California State Parks



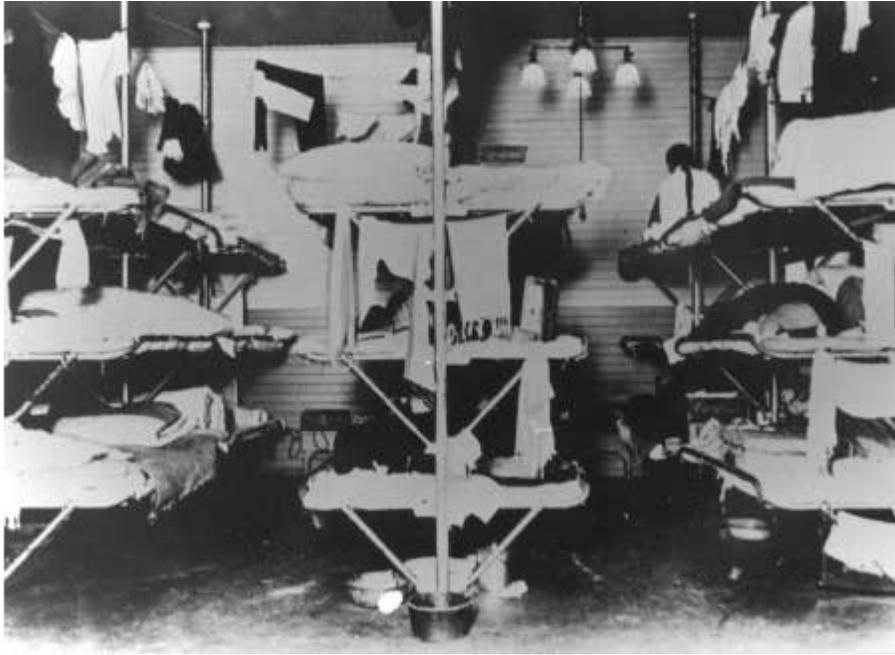
Japanese Picture Brides at the Registry Desk, Angel Island Immigration Station, c. 1916, Historic photo courtesy California State Parks



Women waiting in the Administration Building
Historic photo courtesy California Historical Society



Medical inspections at Angel Island Immigration Station
Historic photo courtesy National Archives



Detention Barracks Interior
Historic photo courtesy of California State Parks



Interrogation at Angel Island Immigration Station

Historic photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD



Hospital Building at Angel Island Immigration Station
Historic photo courtesy California State Parks



Poetry at Angel Island Immigration Station
Contemporary photo by Chris Huie



Detention Barracks at Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation
Contemporary photo courtesy Surrey Blackburn